

ADDRESS
BY
THE RT. HONOURABLE PERRY CHRISTIE
PRIME MINISTER
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
AT
DIPLOMATIC WEEK DINNER
THE BALMORAL CLUB
NASSAU, BAHAMAS
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24TH 2014

It is my pleasure to express to you a warm welcome to The Bahamas for the launching of this important foreign relations initiative: **Bahamas Diplomatic Week**, under the theme, ‘**Beyond Independence and Boldly Into the 21st Century**’. I extend warm congratulations to the Ambassadors of the Republic of South Korea, Germany and France, who presented their Letters of Credence to the Governor-General during this historic week. I wish you an enjoyable and rewarding tour of duty as you, on behalf of your country, seek to deepen relations between your countries and the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

I am pleased to learn that there are some 23 Non-Resident Ambassadors from Asia, Africa, Europe and North and South America, with us this week, joining in this event. Your participation is a demonstration of the bonds of friendship and cooperation, which you share with The Bahamas.

In addition, we have visiting with us our own 12 Heads of Mission and 9 of our Honorary Consuls, to whom I express much gratitude for the service you have rendered The Bahamas in the international arena.

Last year, The Bahamas celebrated its fortieth year of independence; and in addressing the United Nations General Assembly at that time, I renewed the commitment of The Bahamas, as a now mature member of the international community, to play its part in making our planet a more peaceful and prosperous place characterized by cooperation, mutual respect and support.

I also made various declarations about the special challenges and vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States, such as The Bahamas, and the need for a renewed political commitment by the international community to take urgent and concrete actions to address these challenges.

This year, at the 69th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, I participated in the Climate Change Summit. During this historic event, I informed the gathering that, in The Bahamas, the majority of the landmass was no more than 5 feet above sea level, making the country particularly vulnerable to accelerating sea-level rise. I also informed the Summit that preservation of the marine environment was paramount. I wish to repeat for you that The Bahamas is committed to a global consensus on efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change. I pledge to work with all countries to bring this about.

I have participated in these high-level, highly-publicized events because I recognize fully that in today's reality, participation, engagement and partnerships are critical factors in achieving gains in matters pertinent to the international arena and, by extension, domestic affairs.

The Foreign Service of The Bahamas, then, is an integral component of the engine of growth and development of this country. It gives The Bahamas a voice in areas closed to the general public. It permits us

access to the halls in which important decisions, that will affect the global landscape, are made.

It allows us to forge relations with neighbouring and kindred countries and likewise to connect with countries with which we have no geographical, historical or cultural similarities.

It provides us occasions to identify our needs and to assert our positions. And, as an overarching feature, it provides us space to advance the development agenda of The Bahamas, openly and without apologies.

For these reasons, my Government is committed to supporting and strengthening our country's Foreign Service.

During the past two years, the Government has provided additional resources to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry in order to meet the additional demands made on the Foreign Service, including increases in operational expenses and the underwriting of new initiatives.

The goal of The Bahamas in moving forward is to establish diplomatic relations with all the member states of the United Nations, as differences in economy, polity and society ought not to constrain us from interacting in a friendly manner with all states.

This means then that our ultimate goal, moving forward, in the 21st Century is to establish diplomatic relations with all member states of the United Nations. In this regard, it is to be noted that we have already established diplomatic relations with all the countries in the Western Hemisphere from Canada in the north to Argentina in the south; and my government has recently agreed that in addition the countries with which

we have already established relations, we will now do so with 23 other countries in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.

I understand that there are delegations from Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Namibia. I wish to welcome the delegates from Africa who have joined us. As you know the people of The Bahamas are mainly of African descent and the cultural ties are strong.

The premier festival of our country Junkanoo is derived from the festivals of Africa.

Since coming to office, we have paid special attention to our ties with the continent. Our founding Prime Minister Sir Lynden Pindling was the Chair of the Commonwealth in 1985 when the meeting was held here which led to the Commonwealth sanctions and which ultimately led to the freedom of the South African National Hero Nelson Mandela.

Since that time, our ties have become closer, not only with South Africa, where I visited earlier this year for the funeral of the late Nelson Mandela, but with other states in the continent as well.

CARICOM and the African Diaspora have been recognized by the African Union as an integral part of Africa. We accept with pride that designation.

The Bahamas has a local reparations committee which is dedicated to investigating the question of reparations for slavery.

I have promised President Jacob Zuma that as soon as reasonably practicable, I would make an official visit to South Africa and, while in the neighbourhood, to Namibia, and then address the African Union in Addis Abba.

It is part of our view that south/south cooperation is important to the ethos of our people.

On another note, right next door, on our southeast border is our sister territory, the Turks and Caicos Islands, which is a dependant entity of the United Kingdom. As our people have been historically and virtually inseparable, we continue to monitor events in that territory.

A major concern in The Bahamas at present is the upsurge of the illicit trafficking in small arms, light weapons and ammunition, which not only threatens social and national security but also has implications for individual safety and the social and economic well-being of the country.

On 25 September this year at the 69th United Nations General Assembly, The Bahamas deposited its Instrument of Ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty in response to this threat.

The Bahamas will continue to support all international efforts to suppress criminal activity and enhance national security. Another major challenge to Bahamian sovereignty, a real and present threat, is that of illegal immigration, as unchecked immigration in any country could lead to civil strife within its borders and also drain its scarce financial resources.

For this reason, again, in September in New York, The Bahamas signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Organization for Migration to assist us in controlling these illegal flows.

Meanwhile, we maintain cordial relations with our neighbors and have entered into important initiatives with them, on matters of mutual benefit. We believe that the most effective response to illegal immigration must be multi-faceted in approach and based on cross-border efforts.

Since 1973, when The Bahamas became an independent nation, our Foreign Service has been exceptionally successful in international diplomacy and has reflected the very best of our country in the 21st century. It has distinguished The Bahamas as a country that has incredible potential and established credibility, despite its size and peculiar vulnerabilities and challenges.

For example, over the past forty years, it has acted as host to various important international events such as the General Assembly of the Organization of American States and the Heads of Government Meetings of both the Commonwealth and the Caribbean Community.

The Bahamas Foreign Service has participated in bilateral and multilateral negotiations that have resulted in beneficial agreements and arrangements for the country and it has played key roles in international efforts ranging from combating illicit drugs, arms and human trafficking to women's issues and non-communicable diseases.

As we move boldly into the 21st century, we are prepared to join the global community in pressing forward for peace and prosperity for all peoples.

The 21st century has thus far been marked by the rise of the global economy, private enterprise and the digital revolution, which have resulted in unprecedented global economic and cultural shifts and integration.

If each nation is to achieve its aspirations of sustainable growth and development and the well-being of its citizens, it must be bold and creative. And in this regard, I consider the launching of this Diplomatic Week by the Bahamas Foreign Ministry as a response to this charge.

This Forum provides an opportunity for The Bahamas to reflect on its international partnerships and its place in the international community. Likewise, it provides the space to consider the future and initiate new foreign relations endeavours.

I, therefore, take this opportunity to reiterate the appreciation of The Bahamas to you and to the Governments and Organizations that you represent, for your interest and efforts in The Bahamas and for your participation in this inaugural event. My country values your friendship and the contributions you have made towards its development. We look forward, with great optimism, to another forty years of cooperation.

THANK YOU.
